

Africans submit own draft on UNSC expansion

AFP, United Nations

An African draft resolution calling for six new permanent seats with veto power on the UN Security Council, including two for Africa, was formally submitted to the General Assembly Wednesday, African diplomats said.

But the draft was introduced on an individual basis by some African countries rather than on behalf of the entire 54-member African bloc, one diplomat said.

Earlier a negotiating team mandated by the African Union and led by Nigerian Foreign Minister Olu Adeniji told reporters that although Africans would introduce their draft, they remained open to negotiations with other groups on rival proposals.

US asks Iran to keep hands off Iraq

AFP, Washington

The United States told Iran Wednesday not to resume enriching uranium, which could feed a nuclear weapon, and also cautioned Tehran to keep its hands out of Iraq's internal affairs.

The latest US warnings followed an almost daily barrage of charge and counter charge between the two rivals, as both sides size up the situation following the presidential election win of hardline Mahmood Ahmadinejad.

The White House said it would continue to support efforts by the European Union to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

"There needs to be an objective guarantee from Iran to make sure that they are not developing

nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian program," said spokesman Scott McClellan.

"That means there needs to be a permanent end to their uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities. We have made that very clear," he said.

Asked whether the resumption of uranium enrichment would end US support for talks led by Britain, France and Germany, he replied: "I'm not going to play 'what-ifs,' but Iran did make a commitment" to freeze such activity.

"They need to abide by that commitment. They also need to abide by their international obligations, which they have violated over the last couple of decades," said the spokesman.

Senior Iranian officials have

recently been quoted as saying that Tehran will soon resume uranium enrichment and will reject any proposal from the European Union that does not recognise the Islamic republic's right to do so.

The Islamic republic suspended enrichment in October 2003 and widened the freeze last year. However, it has a track record of covering up its activities and shopping illegally on the international black market.

The United States accuses oil-rich Iran of using a civilian nuclear energy program to cover up activities linked to developing atomic weapons. Tehran has rejected the charge and said it has a right to nuclear power.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi soldier guards a room where Iraqi women and children sit during a house search early yesterday in Baghdad. The White House on Wednesday forcefully denounced a suicide car bombing in Iraq that killed at least 32 children and vowed to defeat the "hateful ideology" of those responsible.

Saddam trial may begin next month: Judge

AP, Baghdad

Saddam Hussein could go on trial as early as next month for his alleged role in a massacre 23 years ago, a top judge said Wednesday. He said the ousted dictator could face the death penalty.

Raid Juhi, chief judge of the Iraq Special Tribunal, said the investigation into the July 8, 1982 massacre in Dujail, a predominantly Shiite village 50 miles north of Baghdad, is complete.

Juhi said four other former senior officials would stand trial in the Dujail massacre, in which Saddam's security agents allegedly shot dead at least 50 people after a plot to assassinate him was uncovered.

Juhi said the trial would begin "in August or September, but we would like it to begin before that." Saddam and the others could be sentenced to death if convicted, Juhi said.

Suicide barrage on Baghdad govt bldgs

REUTERS, Baghdad

Three suicide bombers attacked Baghdad's Green Zone government compound yesterday but only two bystanders were killed and police shot and captured one of the bombers before he could set off his explosives.

Police said the attack, claimed by al-Qaeda's Iraq wing, involved a car bomber followed up by two bombers on foot. The target was a checkpoint guarded by Iraqi troops and police and used by civilians arriving for work at the fortified complex.

Doctors at the city's Yarmouk hospital said they had seen two bodies from the attack and five people were wounded -- among them, it appeared, the third bomber who failed in his mission and whose capture could yield important intelligence.

"We felt a strong blast. I came out and saw a car blown up," policeman Haider Abdel Hussein told Reuters Television. Another officer said he

believed the attackers used a police car.

The US military said in a statement that after the car bomb "a suicide bomber detonated himself and the other suicide bomber tried to run away from the scene. Iraqi police shot the man and were evacuating him when they discovered the vest."

It is rare for forces in Iraq to capture people they know are involved in suicide bombing and they will be anxious to gather what intelligence they can -- though it is equally likely the bomber knows little of the men who sent him on his mission.

Most suicide bombers are believed to be young men, many of them foreign, whose religious allegiance to the likes of al-Qaeda's Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, has been allied to the insurgency among Iraq's Sunni Arab minority which appears to be directed in part by loyalists from Saddam Hussein's secular Baathist regime.

US brands Saudis 'key source' of terror fund

AFP, Washington

The US government has suggested wealthy Saudi individuals remain "a significant source" of funds for Islamic terrorists around the world, despite widely-publicised efforts by the desert kingdom to shut down these channels.

The statement by Treasury Undersecretary Stuart Levey before the US Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, contrasted with earlier upbeat assessments by US officials that Saudi Arabia was making good progress in stemming the flow of private money to terrorist groups.

Levey said challenges posed by terrorist financing from within Saudi Arabia were "among the most daunting" his agency had to face as it tries to persuade Islamic nations to strengthen controls over their banks and charitable organisations.

"Wealthy Saudi financiers and charities have funded terrorist organisations and causes that support terrorism and the ideology that fuels the terrorists' agenda,"

Levey told lawmakers Wednesday.

"Even today, we believe that Saudi donors may still be a significant source of terrorist financing, including for the insurgency in Iraq," he added.

US officials expressed particular concern about three Saudi-run charities that operate around the world: the International Islamic Relief Organisation, the World Association of Muslim Youth and the Muslim World League.

The Saudi government has moved to establish an oversight commission for its charitable sector and ordered an end to uncontrolled collection of charitable donations at mosques and retail shops.

But US officials argued they wanted to see convincing proof that these proclaimed initiatives have become reality.

Assistant Secretary of State Anthony Wayne told senators American diplomats continue to stress in their discussions with the Saudis "the need for full implementation, including a fully functioning charities commission."

US boosts security screening of foreigners

AFP, Washington

The US government is to boost its security screening of foreigners making their first visit to the United States, asking them to leave 10 fingerprints, US Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said.

"In the future, first-time visitors to the United States will be enrolled in the programme (US-VISIT programme) by submitting 10 fingerprints," said Chertoff, during a speech on restructuring the department he heads.

"Subsequent entries will continue to require a two-print scan for verification.

"This will dramatically improve our ability to detect and thwart terrorists trying to enter the United States, with no significant increase in inconvenience," Chertoff said.

'Anger over Muslim plight inspired UK bombers'

AFP, London

Anger against the suffering of Muslims in Iraq and other conflict zones spurred Britain's first apparent suicide bombings, and copycat attacks across western Europe are likely, experts said Wednesday.

An expected backlash against the Muslim community -- after it emerged that four Britons of Pakistani origin probably carried out last Thursday's attacks -- would further increase the likelihood of isolated, young extremists turning to deadly violence to express their beliefs, they warned.

"It is the hatred of what they are seeing outside in the world like ... the atrocities committed by Israel in Palestine, thousands of Muslims killed in Chechnya and what is happening in Iraq," Ahmed Versi, editor of Muslim News, told BBC radio.

While most Muslims use the

tools of democracy -- such as taking part in elections -- to voice their grievances, he said a minority resort to bloodshed.

Magnus Ranstorp, director of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at St. Andrew's University in Scotland, blamed radical veterans of wars from Bosnia and Chechnya to Kashmir and Afghanistan.

He accused them of recruiting impressionable individuals -- particularly the young and unemployed -- in the Western world to join their crusade.

"It is a huge European-wide problem," Ranstorp told AFP, noting that snowballing xenophobia, racism and vengefulness would make matters worse.

"There are hundreds of individuals who could become willing, and certainly it increases the chances if there is a polarisation in society."

Pakistan helped foil UK terror plot

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's interior minister said Wednesday that a terror attack was thwarted in Britain before the May general elections in that country and arrests were made in several countries because of help from Pakistan's government.

"Before the general elections in the UK we received reports that this sort of situation might arise, and attacks were aborted because of information provided by the government of Pakistan, and arrests were made in various countries and here," Interior Minister Aftab Khan Sherpao told a news conference in the capital.

He gave no specifics about the alleged plot.

Sherpao made the revelations at a press conference to discuss the alleged role of British citizens of Pakistani origin in last week's terror attacks in London. He said Pakistan was fully cooperating with Britain in the current investigation.